

# 2023 “OUT OF (AND INTO) AFRICA”

## POST-CONFERENCE BRIEFING

by

**Biennial Conference Series Chair: Dr. Omar J. Khan** (Morgan State University)

Following the success of the Inaugural “Out of (and Into) Africa” conference - International Symposium on African Consumer Marketing and Firm Strategies - which was held at the Graves School of Business and Management, Morgan State University, Baltimore in 2018, and the second edition organized and hosted online by Morgan State University in 2021, we are proud to have now successfully hosted online the third edition on **November 6-7, 2023**. The “Out of (and Into) Africa” international business conference series is fully virtual, and it is here to stay!

This 2023 conference has turned out to be another **resounding success!** Counting each individual attendee only once over the course of the 1.5 days conference, we had **312 attendees** at the 2023 edition! This is especially gratifying, evidencing a great need for this type of recurring Africa-centric venue. This was the third conference in our biennial “Out of (and Into) Africa” conference series. Attendees, including presenters, joined from all across the Africa, Europe and North America. A truly international event, speaking well of our global impact. Best of all, given vagaries of online conferences and time zone differences, we are proud to say that the conference, *once again*, ran very smoothly indeed.

This biennial “Out of (and Into) Africa” conference series is now permanently held completely online (using the zoom platform), included multi-HBCU involvement with three major tracks: consumer marketing, firm strategy and society & institutions. We received strong submissions leading to insightful selected papers, exciting panels, enlightening plenary (including keynote) speakers and forward-looking discussion at the conference. The key features established at the 2023 conference were as follows:

- 1) **Online conference format:** This online venue (through Zoom) was originally warranted (in 2021) to manage COVID-19 pandemic consequences, but it has also led to dramatically lowering costs for attendees and increasing our reach to parts of the Africa continent that may not be served by many established conference venues..
- 2) **Multi-HBCU involvement:** Following the initiative led by the Graves School of Business & Management at Morgan State University, we expanded engagement across the HBCU community in enhancing leadership of business and marketing scholarship regarding Africa. Howard University continued to be a partner in this edition.
- 3) **Conference theme and three “divisions” or programs to the conference:** In addition to the Firm Strategy (firm-level research) and Consumer Marketing (consumer-level research), we continued with the division/program of Society & Institutions which captures macro-level research addressing public policy and institutions intertwined with international African business and entrepreneurship development. We also initiated a conference theme for each edition of the “Out of (and Into) Africa” conference series going forward – starting with 2023 edition’s conference theme of **Africapitalism**.

While taking an outsized economic hit during the COVID-19 pandemic years, African consumer and business spending is re-exerting itself – but in fits and starts. While it still lags behind most emerging areas of the world, the much-vaunted African demographic dividend is ever present and projected to unlock more than \$3 trillion in consumer spending by 2050 when Africa’s population hovers around 2.5 billion. (McKinsey, 2023) Its working-age population will be larger than China or India by 2034, while its abundant natural resources and continued dynamism are primed for fast-paced growth. The pandemic ended up creating opportunities (and challenges) for

entrepreneurship and small & medium-sized enterprises (World Economic Forum, 2020). Innovative solutions including products/services were introduced in various countries across the continent – with far-reaching implications. The “Africa Rising” mantra of the 1990s early 2000’s has taken on new force – with renewed academic scholarship coming to the fore along with entrepreneurial fervor (Nachum, et al., 2023). Partnerships are blossoming between African countries and all parts of the world - including China (leading other major Asian countries), the Middle East, Europe, Oceania, and the Americas.

The past few years have witnessed cross-fertilization of African-born entrepreneurship and innovation into other parts of the world, along with growth opportunities for MNCs and SMEs into Africa. Our biennially-updated showcase of scholarly insights and international business in this under-studied continent - including, and especially, insights and strategy/tactics that **originate** from Africa – has already proven to be a sustainable, successful venue. This 2023 conference edition also highlighted significant diversity and high caliber of business people, many of whom generously accepted our invitation to engage and elucidate through our panels and plenary sessions, leading the landscape of international business in Africa.

Despite the promising social economic development in Africa and foreign marketers' enthusiasm toward its future growth, there has historically been limited, sustained academic research. The literature shows existing knowledge on African consumption and behavior, for example, is fragmented. We have established the following four goals for the “Out of (and Into) Africa” conference series, which we clearly showed in the 2023 edition:

1. Reviewing current knowledge on African consumers, marketing, firm strategy, and societal policies - highlighting gaps in our knowledge and understanding of the field in that African context.
2. Developing an agenda for future research.
3. Fostering collaborations among consumer, marketing, firm strategy and public policy researchers with similar interests.
4. Remaining unabashedly Africa-centric in the implementation of each conference edition.

At the 2023 conference edition, selected research papers presented in the Consumer Marketing Track explored consumer experiences, systematic barriers, e-commerce, employee citizenship behavior, corporate social responsibility, and innovation through African tech hubs. Selected research papers in the Firm Strategy Track explored path breaking strategies of emerging market firms, crisis resolution between employees-employers, founders’ identities and international opportunity recognition, and women’s microbusinesses. Selected research papers in the Society & Institutions track explored public policy implications of China’s enterprises into Africa, knowledge transfer through university-business linkages, international business competence, manufacturing and marketing hubs, and strategies for grassroots, fast economic development.

The **best paper award for the 2023 “Out of (and Into) Africa” Conference** was won by Juliet Oriaifo (of North Carolina A & T State University) for her paper, “EM Path-Breaking Approach to Internationalization” Congratulations to her excellent scholarship!

Our **keynote speaker**, Dr. Owen Omagiafo, President and Group CEO of Transnational Corporation of Nigeria, delivered a bold, uplifting address to aptly kick off conference proceedings. Wonderfully insightful plenaries and panels punctuated the 1.5 days conference, with topics such as story-making and co-creation for brands, women and empowerment in African business, consumer and designer brands, tech entrepreneurship catalyzing African growth, unique African opportunities, U.S./African educational partnerships, young entrepreneurs thriving in African conditions and building successful African business, and linguistic capital across Africa - all vigorously and richly discussed. Quite a filling and fitting tribute to this excitingly resourceful continent!

The Africa-centric conference series provides great opportunities for brainstorming and dialogue among researchers and marketing practitioners. We believe it vital in furthering collaboration between academia and businesses in the US (and other parts of the world) with those from all over Africa. Our 2023 attendees included academic faculty, doctoral students, policy makers, economic development experts, bureaucrats, think tank researchers, NGO experts, entrepreneurs and major corporate leaders. We encourage scholars from Africa and worldwide to continue collaboration and remain connected with the “Out of (and Into) Africa” platform we are creating at Morgan.

We encourage those interested in the developing platform to email the conference series chair, so we can help maintain success of this biennial series and progress in this research stream. We envision the platform to act as a consistently updated repository devoted to international business research with an Africa focus.

This scholarly event also highlights the growing significance of the Graves School of Business and Management, and underscores Morgan’s leadership in disseminating African international business scholarship.

*The 2023 conference was sponsored by Morgan State University, Howard University and CIBER-CMCC.*

#### **2023 CONFERENCE ADMINISTRATION:**

**Omar J. Khan** (Morgan State University), Conference Chair and Firm Strategy Track Chair  
**Haiyan Hu** (Morgan State University), Consumer Marketing Track Chair  
**Wheeler R. Winstead and Jean Wells** (Howard University), Society & Institutions Track Chair  
**Fatimah Ishola-Lemomu** (Morgan State University), Program Manager, and Online Developer  
**Ania Ueno** (Howard University), Technology & Graphics Specialist, and Online Developer

#### **References:**

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Nachum, L., Stevens, C., Newenham-Kahindi, A., Lundan, S., Rose, E. and Wantchekon, L. (2023), “ Africa Rising: Opportunities for Advancing Theory on People, Institutions, and the Nation State in International Business,” *Journal of International Business Studies*, 54: 938-955.

World Economic Forum (2020), “In post-pandemic Africa, small businesses could be key to recovery,” retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/strengthening-africa-s-best-pandemic-defense>